

# **Mahatmas and Chelas**

**By Leoline L. Wright**

*Theosophical Manuals Series*

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## Chapter 1: Who and What are the Mahatmas?

It should never be forgotten that Occultism is concerned with the *inner man*, who must be strengthened and freed from the dominion of the physical body and its surroundings, which must become his servants. Hence the *first* and chief necessity of chelaship is a spirit of absolute unselfishness and devotion to Truth; then follow self-knowledge and self-mastery. These are all-important; while outward observance of fixed rules is a matter of secondary moment. — H. P. Blavatsky, *Lucifer*, Vol. 4, p. 348n

The teaching about mahatmas is one the most important in the whole range of theosophical study. The reason for this lies in the fact that to attain the state of mahatmaship is the object of human evolution and its culmination. Understanding something of what a mahatma is will show what we are going to be in the future ourselves. For the aim of man's evolution is to transform the ordinary human being into a perfected spiritual man, a mahatma. The word is a combination of two Sanskrit words: *maha*, "great;" and *atman*, "soul." Thus the word mahatma means literally "a great soul."

If we look around us even in ordinary life we see that men are everywhere unequally developed. There are always the leaders in every department of human activity. In the business world there are those who are sometimes called "captains of industry," leaders in the development of industrial and economic life. The same is true in the world of politics, art and religion, in education and the realm of science. It is a universal law that the organization of the lesser elements in any field under enlightened and active leadership is the basis of success. Even among poets and painters, whose work depends upon individual freedom of expression, we find that they have their associations to promote their common objects and authority. How much, too, we owe to the great geniuses of the human race, such characters as Galileo, Shakespeare, and Florence Nightingale, and many others whose vision and power stand out above the common level of humanity as dazzling examples of what one may accomplish by leadership in the pursuit of truth.

This same basic law holds good in the field of human evolution. Even the elder Huxley, one of the pronounced materialists of the 19th century, admitted that there must be in the universe beings as much higher than man as man is higher than the black beetle. Such a belief springs logically and inescapably from the facts of evolution. But theosophical teaching shows that such perfected human beings are actually living now on this earth and that they can be known and sometimes contacted.

Questions that spring at once to the mind of the inquirer will naturally be: What are such people like? What are they doing and where do they live? To the first question we answer in the words of G. de Purucker:

The Mahatmans are highly evolved men, controlling powers over Nature's forces which they have gained through self-directed evolution during many, many lives in the near and distant past. Now they are become Masters of life; in former ages they were men like you and me. — *The Masters and the Path of Occultism*, p. 9

In this short passage a number of important expressions are used. We may note that Dr. de Purucker calls the mahatmas "Masters of Life," for that is what a mahatma is. He is a graduate in nature's great university of evolutionary development with its immense ranges of knowledge — knowledge founded upon experience and "self-directed evolution." Thus, the mahatma is the perfect flower of human evolution.

The existence and nature of the mahatmas show how and why our evolution is worthwhile. To become mahatmas is our goal, and theosophy indicates the scientific path to achieve this goal. This goal is the result and reward for that student who will practice the lofty ethics and develop the rounded and perfect character which are necessary to attain it.

One of the first things we associate with the nature of a mahatma is the possession of great spiritual powers, and to understand the work of the mahatmas we must know a little about what these powers are. And in order to understand what these powers are like and how they have been acquired, we must examine more closely the real nature of human beings and of the universe which surrounds us.

We have referred already to our cosmos as a great university of evolutionary experience, but most of us have a very limited idea of what the universe consists of. We think of it generally as merely physical phenomena — the rocks and the ocean, the trees and mountains, the stars, the solar system and the galaxies. But if we turn to something closer to ourselves we get a different picture. Consider for a moment some friend we love. What are real friends? Their body and physical appearance? No, for they may be quite plain, even unprepossessing. Nor is it these outer things that remain in the heart when death comes, as we think, to take them from us. What remains with us to cherish, what we love, are their qualities — their power to love and give, their intelligence, originality, goodness, or charm. These are all intangible qualities which cannot be seen, weighed, or measured. We can only feel and love them by means of our own intangible perceptions and sympathy. After their death, the picture in our minds of our friends' physical appearance may grow dim with the lapse of time, yet their character — the real person — never fades away from our hearts.

So we see how it is that the physical is not the real. The human body is governed by physical laws, but the mind and soul are governed by psychological and spiritual laws. Can it be different with the universe of which we are a part? Can the part be greater than the whole? Can there be something in the flower which was not latent in the seed? Can the seed of a thistle produce a fig tree? And can the universe produce a soul if it is itself soulless?

From this point of view we realize that the most important parts of the universe around us are invisible and cannot be contacted by our physical senses. Indeed, the universe is like a human being, who is a miniature universe, a microcosm of the macrocosm. In both there are ranges or planes of being which we can know only by the faculties within ourselves, perceptions belonging to those various ranges of being.

Like us, the universe has first a physical aspect with which we are familiar. Then, within this and blending with it in its lowest levels, is the astral or ethereal world. Above and within this are finer and still more ethereal worlds. Here the psychological energies that embody the laws and activities corresponding to our mental and emotional life have their activity and sway. Beyond and within the psychological realm is the spiritual plane where dwells and is active our own atma-buddhi or divine-spiritual self. Here on this immensely high and powerful plane of the universe are celestial beings whose unseen energies and activities govern all the planes and worlds below them.

We can now perceive how undeveloped we are. All we know of ourselves and the universe around us is a limited knowledge of the physical world of our senses plus a still more limited and ineffectual perception of our mental and emotional life. Of our astral, ethereal, or spiritual ranges of inner being we know practically nothing, while to the average person and to scientists, the higher realms of the universe remain a sealed book at present.

For the mahatmas it is far different, although theosophy tells us that within all people lie sleeping organs of perception belonging to these unknown planes of their being. Through these now latent perceptions, if developed, we might become conscious of these inner worlds where we might be as much at home as we are on this physical plane. The mahatmas are men and women who have awakened and developed these sleeping faculties, and it is from their training of these faculties that they derive their transcendent powers.

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## Chapter 2: The Spiritual Powers of a Mahatma

A Mahatma endowed with power over space, time, mind, and matter, is a possibility just because he is a perfected man. Every human being has the germ of all the powers attributed to these great Initiates, the difference lying solely in the fact that we have in general not developed what we possess the germ of, while the Mahatma has gone through the training and experience which have caused all the unseen human powers to develop in him, and conferred gifts that look god-like to his struggling brother below. — W. Q. JUDGE: *The Ocean of Theosophy*, pp. 11-12

Two things are involved in the development of spiritual powers. First, we must understand ourselves, then comprehend the universe of which we are a part. It is the same with any student. He who would research in a scientific laboratory must begin by learning the theory and then how to use the equipment with which to conduct experiments.

No door opens without the right key. The knowledge of our own constitution, of our own capacities and powers, is the key which will unlock the door to the inner worlds of being lying within and behind and beyond the physical world. Here is the meaning of the expression "self-directed evolution." The world lags in its evolution, suffering and confusion prevail, because for so long we have been taught to look outside ourselves for strength and spiritual wisdom. Religion tells us to rely on a vague and distant God, while science offers the barren idea of a ruthless nature as the great evolutionary force.

But theosophy says: know thyself, for within lie all the wisdom and potencies of the universe. The urge to evolution through self-expression and experience does not come from blind physical nature. It comes from our own higher spiritual self, so only within ourselves can we find the knowledge and the power to achieve the aims of evolution. Without our own vision, willpower, and courage we could never get anywhere. A child can be helped and guided by parents and teachers. But only it can make itself walk, eat, study, or use its physical and mental faculties.

So one of the passwords of theosophy is self-directed evolution, which puts into our own hands the science of self-knowledge. It teaches what the seven basic elements of our constitution are, giving us the spiritual laws by which we can understand, control, and direct these elements. Only we ourselves can apply this knowledge in our daily lives to bring about a higher and quicker evolution of our own natures. Therefore the student no longer looks outside of himself for the strength to accomplish this, but becomes his own savior, powerful enough at last to make of himself a god in human form. Did not Jesus say: "Know ye not that ye are gods?"; "Greater things than these shall ye do"; and "the kingdom of God is within you" — thus pointing the way to the spiritual basis of self-directed evolution?

It is this kind of self-directed evolution that a mahatma has been practicing for many lives on earth. When we too grasp its importance and start to apply it practically to ourselves, we shall be putting our feet on the path that leads to the goal of human evolution, mahatmaship.

Some of the highest forms of mahatmic powers exist even now in all of us. There is the creative imagination, the power to visualize what we want or need or wish to do, and then give it mental form and direction. Successful business people inevitably possess this power, as do artists and scientists. All are highly gifted with creative imagination, yet everyone has it in some degree, and it can be developed in ourselves. Katherine Tingley wrote:

Visualize! Visualize! You touch a mystic law when you create in imagination the picture of mighty things, for you open a door to new powers within yourself. . . . If you aspire, visualize your aspirations. Make a mind-picture of your spiritual ideals, a picture of the spiritual life as you know it to be, and carry that picture with you day by day. — *Theosophy: The Path of the Mystic*, p. 49

Another great power most people possess is willpower. Without a strong and active will the creative imagination is useless. There are people of talent everywhere who are yet so irresolute and procrastinating that they go through life without accomplishing anything. There are also those like Beethoven who, with his terrible handicap of total deafness, had the courage and indomitable will to bring into being those superb masterpieces which later he could not hear.

In a mahatma the creative imagination and the *spiritual will* have been raised to their ultimate in human development. The words "spiritual will" are emphasized, for the personal will, actuated as it often is by selfish desires and narrow interest, will not get us far. It too often results in a form of mere willfulness that may injure others and make difficult karma for the person himself. Personal will cannot serve in the inner spiritual realms of nature where the mahatma works, but must first be purified and made impersonal. Only then does it become a *spiritual* power, trained and actuated by impersonal love.

One of the first things a student of occultism has to learn is the meaning and might of impersonal love. Occultism is practical or applied theosophy. One may be a student of theosophy without becoming an occultist. For example, one may be convinced that karma and reincarnation, as theories, offer a completely satisfactory explanation of life — and let it go at that. Another, once convinced of the truth of these teachings, will use creative imagination to change his thoughts and actions, perhaps to avoid making negative karma. This latter has begun to be an occultist, making practical use of theosophy. But such a motive — taking care of his own karma — is still personal, and so inadequate *spiritually*. No matter how justly it leads him to deal with others, he is still doing it for himself. It is a personal, not a spiritual, motive.

The human spiritual nature is called in theosophy atma-buddhi-manas. Atman is the spiritual essence at the center of us, the root of being which is the same in every creature. It is therefore universal, common to all things. Buddhi is the spiritual vesture, the highest aspect of soul. Through buddhi, atman is stepped down to the individual, manas the thinker. Atman, clothed or ensouled by the buddhic vesture, is a pure ray of the cosmic self. It is an emanation of the great self of the universe. People must visualize their atma-buddhi and aspired to it. Until they have felt in their hearts the throb and thrill of the universal atmic spirit they cannot understand and practice impersonal love.

It is not enough to love just our children, parents, and friends, and be willing to sacrifice our interest to theirs. This is fine, and the first beautiful step on the path, but to reach higher levels in occultism one must still go farther. It is comparatively easy to love and sacrifice for our own children. More difficult is so to work for the well-being or happiness all other people. So begins impersonal love, and when we have expanded our love and sense of responsibility to the whole world, we are beginning to be true occultists. We are sacrificing the personal to the spiritual will, becoming gradually incapable of harming any living creature.

The thoughtful seeker will admit that such genuinely practiced thought and action demands an intense, continuous, and arduous self-training, but its rewards are beyond price. We lose all fear for ourselves, all worry over our own success. We are able to train our children to a higher level of service and happiness, and to save them from many of the mistakes and sufferings caused by selfishness. We acquire a broader wisdom in all the relationships and circumstances of life, because we are bringing the cosmic universal light of atma-buddhi to illumine our minds and hearts. This is what Jesus meant when he told us to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness and "all these things" shall be added unto us.

The mahatma has been training himself along these lines for ages. He has so changed, developed, and transfigured the very atoms of his whole being that he is complete responsive to the divine intelligence and the will of the cosmic universal self. He no longer lives for himself in any way. It would be impossible for his refined nature to return from the range and freedom, the peace and bliss of cosmic harmony, to the fevers and petty rivalries, the limited and ignoble aims of personal life. Those who have even faintly experienced the wondrous happiness of impersonal living can understand this, and bend their spiritual will towards attaining such freedom and peace.

We now have a better idea of the spiritual powers of a mahatma. Having finally allied himself with the universal soul of nature, all its many realms — spiritual, psychological, psychic, astral, and physical — lie before him like an open book. Perhaps we may make a picture that will give us a clearer idea of such a state

of being. Think of one who for a lifetime has lived in a narrow shut-in valley, but as old age approaches gets the idea to see what the world is really like. He determines to climb the mountains that hem his valley in. After great labor he reaches the almost inaccessible peaks. For the first time he sees the earth spread before his gaze — its plains and valleys, rivers and forests, its mighty cities. Overhead stretches the immensity of the sky where at night he sees a whole universe of wheeling suns and the far-scattered constellations of the Milky Way. It is a magnificent revelation to his dazzled eyes and to his mind that had never been able to think beyond the narrow valley where he lived so long. For the first time he begins to understand the nature of the world at large.

So with the human soul. Dwelling for long in the dark and narrow limitations of the personality, but at last aspiring through awakened imagination, it turns to the mountain peaks of the Mystic East. Calling upon all its powers of strength and endurance it toils long and often painfully upward. Then at last this soul can stand upon the inner heights of its own spiritual nature seeing and understanding what a different universe it is from the one seen before from the dark, narrow valley.

So the mahatma too stands at last at a summit of his own universe, where he has brought himself by the use of creative imagination and spiritual will. The forces of occult nature are now his to use. Through the powers attained by this slow upward progress, he can employ these forces of occult nature to produce phenomena that to the ignorant seem like miracles. In fact they are in fact only an enlightened and impersonally directed use of these powerful and hidden energies of nature.

Better still, he now sees clearly the causes of human misery and has the ability to help. He has reached wisdom and has the power which enables him to send currents of spiritual energy into the thought-atmosphere of mankind. Many of the most beneficent movements in history are the result of these spiritual thought-currents broadcast by the mahatmas among mankind. These currents touch here and there men and women who are ripe for spiritual activity, and great ameliorations for humanity result. For example, some of the most beneficial and far-reaching discoveries of modern science are said to have been due to the help given to their discoveries by the mahatmas. We quote here a reference from Charles J. Ryan's *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement*:

Professor Crookes, the chemist to whom science owes the great discovery of 'radiant matter' as he called it (now known as 'ionized' matter), which led directly in his and other hands to the modern atomic theories and the 'New Physics,' became a councillor of the London Lodge, and, it is said, received communications from the Master Morya, who took great interest in his work. The Master's attention was attracted to him by the moral courage he showed in daring to investigate psychic phenomena [which at that time were ridiculed by materialistic science and those who 'dabbled' in them ostracized], and in publicly declaring that they were facts, scientifically demonstrable, whatever their interpretation might be. Crookes suffered bitter persecution from many of his scientific colleagues, but even under the strongest pressure he never modified his statements or withdrew his records. — p. 163

The student of modern history and the events of past centuries will be interested in tracing where the influences of the spiritual thought currents broadcast by the mahatmas may have been at work. The influence of the writings of the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite is a case in point. He was a mysterious writer who lived in the third century AD. His ideas had a remarkable influence in shaping the thought of early medieval Christianity, preserving much of Neoplatonic thought in Christian theology which otherwise would have been forgotten. No one knows who he actually was, but his writing molded Christian thinking into a more spiritual form than it would have taken. He has been called the founder of Christian mysticism.

The thinkers, philanthropists, and scientists influenced by the mahatmas are not used by them like puppets — that would be an utterly unjustifiable forcing of the free will of men and women, something entirely contrary to every teaching and law of occultism. It is only that some people, and especially searchers for truth and a way to help the world, have made themselves ready to be touched and inspired by these spiritual lightwaves, sent out constantly from the heights where the mahatmas watch over and encourage and inspire all who are advanced enough to feel them.

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### Chapter 3: The Elder Brothers of Humanity

We have partially answered the second question, "What are the mahatmas doing?" The answer is further implied in the above heading. The mahatmas are our elder brothers in point of evolution and spiritual relationship. Therefore, a great part of their work consists in watching over and stimulating spiritually the life of the human race. In *The Ocean of Theosophy* by William Quan Judge we are told that mankind has never been without a friend. It has always had

... a line of elder brothers who continually watch over the progress of the less progressed, preserve the knowledge gained through aeons of trial and experience, and continually seek for opportunities of drawing the developing intelligence of the race . . . to consider the great truths concerning the destiny of the soul. These elder brothers also keep the knowledge they have gained of the laws of nature in all departments, and are ready when cyclic law permits to use it for the benefit of mankind. They have always existed as a body, all knowing each other, no matter in what part of the world they may be, and all working for the race in many different ways. — p. 3

The nature of their work may be better understood if we take the expression above quoted, "they have always existed as a body, all knowing each other," and consider all that the words imply. The "body" referred to is what is known in theosophy as the Brotherhood of Compassion or sometimes as the Lodge. Theosophy tells us that from the very earliest ages of humanity on this earth, there has always existed an organization or brotherhood of advanced souls. These advanced souls, the mahatmas, became perfected human beings in former periods of evolution, for this Earth and everything connected with it is a reïmbodiment of a former and less developed world. In that world we who are now human were passing through lower stages of life. But there lived then — as there live now and always will — those further along on the course of evolution. They had already reached perfection as humans when our earth and everything on it came to be reïmbodied in this present globe at the beginning of the immense period of evolution through which everything is passing now.

At the beginning of this present period the human race was but an infant humanity, and like all infants needed constant care, help, and guidance, and this help and care came from these advanced souls, mahatmas who had become perfected human beings in that former world. So they were ready to act as teachers of humanity; just as our teachers in ordinary life are men and women who have completed their education in periods of schooling preceding our own.

In those early ages the mahatmas lived among men, guiding and helping them openly. But the life of the race is very much like that of every child. The time comes when youth must begin to think and act for itself, use its own initiative, cultivate its own willpower, and make its own mistakes. When that time comes, young people generally rebel against the council of their elders. As they lack experience, self-knowledge, and wisdom, they go wrong in ways that they often find it impossible to remedy in one life.

It happened very much like this with early mankind. At that time humanity was far more ignorant than the peoples of today. This was only to be expected, for mankind was then just beginning to learn the moral lessons that many of us today find are instinctive in our characters at birth. Present day men and women have been learning through the experience and suffering of many incarnations, but in those early times the great majority were still undeveloped as human beings. They were blind and greedy and willful, so that great wrongs were committed. War, and what we call sin, appeared, and H. P. Blavatsky's description in *The Secret Doctrine* of the Atlanteans gives a picture of how dark and wicked were some of the early civilizations which mankind developed in those forgotten, prehistoric times. At last people grew so selfish and material that the mahatmas were no longer sought as guides and teachers by the great mass of humanity.

It was then that the Brotherhood of Compassion, to which these great sages and seers whom we call the mahatmas belonged, retreated into the background and began their occult or hidden work for the race — work



which up to that unhappy time they had been able to do openly, moving more or less freely among mankind. The chief reason for their withdrawal lies of course in the danger of entrusting their occult knowledge to people who would selfishly misuse it and so bring disasters upon themselves and others. Unfortunately, the same restriction still prevails, for though people have progressed enormously, they have not yet learned the folly and the dangers of selfishness.

The mahatmas, then, in those far-off times, began special work with individuals here and there who were more promising than humanity in its unevolved masses. For, of course, at that time there was also the same inequality of development among human beings that holds everywhere today. Some egos are older than others and therefore more developed in character and intelligence. It was these advanced egos that the mahatmas singled out and gathered into schools or colleges in different parts of the world. Every country in antiquity had one or more of these occult schools for the study of the spiritual sciences, called in theosophical writings the Mystery schools.

Two important points should be brought out here. One is that even among the mahatmas themselves there are many grades of development. Some of them — just as in every other phase of evolution, spiritual or otherwise — are of higher degree than others, for the Brotherhood of Compassion is a hierarchy. We quote here a passage explaining this hierarchical principle of being:

Thus it is that the great sages or masters form one stage or degree on the evolutionary scale just above men of average development. There are other still greater beings on the ladder of life, who are the teachers of these great sages and who are more highly evolved men than the great sages themselves are. Higher even than these are yet others still more fully evolved, who may with propriety be called human gods; they are nature's controllers, governors, of our own planet earth.  
— G. de Purucker: *The Esoteric Tradition*, 3rd & rev. ed., p. 507

It will readily be seen that many of these godlike beings are too far beyond our plane of consciousness to be conceivable to us. And being so, they cannot directly influence us. This brings us to another of the services our elder brothers, the mahatmas, perform for humanity. That service consists in "stepping down" or transforming the vitalizing energies of these celestial beings so that they can be assimilated by human nature. A transformer is an apparatus for reducing or stepping down a high voltage current to a lower one when that higher voltage might be too great for the small apparatus to use. It operates this way between with the gods and humanity. To be brought into direct contact with the energies of the gods would burn us up, so to speak, as in the mythological tale of the youth who ventured to raise the veil of Isis in order to look directly upon the face of the goddess and was slain by a vision he had not power to sustain. So our elder brothers act for us in the nature of benign transformers and step down for us the vitalizing currents of the celestial beings who, in the background of visible creation, govern and sustain our universe.

The second point to be marked by the student is the fact that we should not confuse the Brotherhood of Compassion with the Mystery schools. The latter are related to the Brotherhood of Compassion itself much as a preparatory school is related to a university. The Mystery schools are lower in grade because composed of chelas or students in occultism. The teachers in a genuine Mystery school must all have passed certain tests and undergone definite occult training, but in this day and age are not mahatmas, though in the earliest prehistoric Mystery schools they often were conducted by the mahatmas themselves. Today the mahatmas are in the background and watch over this work. It is the privilege of students in a Mystery school to participate in spirit in the great initiatory periods which still take place during certain sacred seasons of the year at favored points somewhere on our earth. All human beings are related through their spiritual principles to this Brotherhood of Compassion — for we derive the higher aspects of our being from a common divine source — but the chelas of a Mystery school are in training under their adept teachers, and this training will enable them ultimately to become consciously an active part of that Brotherhood as the mahatmas and their agents already are.

In the Mystery schools, first founded as described in past ages, the mahatmas in those early days taught their pupils the truths of the archaic wisdom-science called by such titles in history as the secret doctrine of the ages, the esoteric tradition, and other such designations, which we today know under the name of theosophy. This has been defined by Dr. de Purucker as follows:

It is, as a body of doctrines, the formulation in human language of the essential truths of the Universe. It comprises the facts regarding the nature of the Universe, visible and invisible, spiritual, intellectual, psychical, ethereal, astral, and physical. It comprises also the teachings regarding the structure and operations and laws of the Universe. It also includes teaching a man to find himself, i. e., to discover and uncover from its enshrouding veils, the god within him. — *The Masters and the Path of Occultism*, p. 39

The teaching and training of these pupils, however, was but one phase of their work, for they were also the founders of the world religions. From time to time they sent out from their midst some of the highest among them. These great souls incarnated in different races and eras, when they taught anew the ethical laws upon which all life must be based if it is to endure. It is characteristic of the human race to forget its divine origin. People become so engrossed in the pursuit of personal and selfish ends and the treasures of this world that every religion grows dim as the centuries pass away. The purity of the founder's teaching becomes clouded and fades in human memory. When the religion deteriorates and becomes a vehicle for the ambitions and power of priests and theologians it becomes necessary again and again for these ethical fundamentals to be restated in a fresh form.

The earliest of these teachers sent out by the great Lodge of which history speaks is Krishna in India. He struck anew for the world of his day the keynote of these same ethical teachings. They are embodied in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and other scriptures of the Hindu religion. About 2,500 years later Gautama the Buddha came to correct the abuses which had crept into Hinduism and to give the ethics of life a simpler expression, one the common people could easily understand. A little after him came Sankaracharya. To Persia was sent Zoroaster who did the same for mid-Asia. To China were sent Lao-Tse and Confucius, and to the Mediterranean and European world Jesus the Christ. All these great souls taught the same fundamental ethical truths, but in each case adapted to the characteristics and the points of view of the people and the period they came to teach. The basic doctrines of all world religions are identical, because they are all but different expressions of the same wisdom-religion.

Another aspect of this work as time flowed on was the establishing of more Mystery schools throughout the world. The clearest historical picture we have of these Mystery schools of antiquity is in ancient Greece, Orpheus being the traditional Savior or great teacher of the Mediterranean peoples. He appeared in archaic or prehistoric times and is credited with the Mysteries of Eleusis near Athens. Another was the celebrated one at Crotona established by a messenger from the Lodge, Pythagoras. Still another was the Mystery school at Samothrace. Like their parent-school, the Lodge of mahatmas, these schools sent out in turn their agents, men like Plato with his Academy at Athens in the fourth century BC. Plato too was an initiate and has had an immense spiritual influence upon both ancient and modern thought. Some of the worthiest dramatists of Greece, such as poets as Aeschylus and Sophocles, were students of these Mystery schools, and their dramas are true Mystery-plays depicting the trials of the human soul in its pilgrimage to perfection. Similar Mystery schools are heard of in all the countries of antiquity. Plato, for example, is said to have visited and studied at one in India, the members of which were called Gymnosophists, and Herodotus, the Greek historian and traveler, is said to have visited the one in Egypt.

The work of the mahatmas is thus not only to watch over and inspire and stimulate the progress of humanity, but to keep us in touch with the divine energies of the cosmos. They are also teachers and personal guides to all who are ready for the intensive and arduous training in the occult life. As the proportion of people who are ready bears a ratio of about one in ten million of ordinary people, their actual pupils are very, very few. Sooner or later all pupils of a mahatma will become teachers in their turn and then seek out others whose souls are awakened to listen and learn. Thus the work and influence of the mahatmas is not confined to the spiritual thought-currents, but follows more individual and definite channels, reaching out in particular and special ways through the work of their agents to inspire and guide any who are looking to higher and better things for the world, for there are thousands of bewildered hearts now seeking for some way out of the sorrows and miseries oppressing all classes and peoples.

Another aspect of the mahatmas' work consists in safeguarding occult truth from exploitation and misuse by the evil and ignorant. Only such portions of the archaic science are openly taught as will prove of benefit to mankind. Today some of the scientists realize the mischief that can and has been unfortunately done by the

use of scientific knowledge for destructive and cruel purposes, and scientific bodies are beginning to take steps towards arousing public conscience in this matter through the channels of education.

The forces physical science has put into mortal hands, powerful as they are, are but feeble when compared to the powers and energies of occult nature, so that the knowledge of them must be guarded from the insatiable curiosity and selfish use of the undisciplined. We must first learn, as scientists admit, to develop our ethical and social conscience, to become a selfless power for good in the world, before we can be safely trusted with secrets of occult power. One has only to look into the dangers of dabbling even in the lower psychic forces such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, mediumship and the like. H. P. Blavatsky's writings and *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* contain material illustrating this point. When the student has thought seriously about the matter he will realize what the consequences would be to most of us if the control of the secret and mighty forces of occult nature were to become available to unscrupulous ambition.

All down the ages the great seers and sages have protected mankind against itself, as far as that is possible without interfering with the freedom of the human will, and this phase of their work can be done by no other agency. Now we begin to see an outline of the great spiritual hierarchy of beings who link the human race by graduated stages of consciousness to the supreme hierarch of our own solar universe, the cosmic god at the invisible spiritual heart of our sun. Every planet has in its turn a celestial ruler or hierarch who imbodyes the summit of consciousness on that planet, which is equally true of the earth. The ruler or hierarch of our planet Terra is the head and heart of the Brotherhood of Compassion which as a body cares for and oversees the evolution and well being of all earth's creatures. The mahatmas we are now thinking about are the perfected human beings who link the mass of humankind with this Brotherhood of Compassion doing its beneficent work as the elder brothers and spiritual teachers of the human race.

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## Chapter 4: The Mahatmas and the Theosophical Movement

We come now to what is, for us, a most interesting and important and well known part of the work of the mahatmas: the Theosophical Movement. The word "movement" is used here instead of the word "society" for the reason that the Theosophical Society is only one phase of the immense and ancient Theosophical Movement itself. The Theosophical Society dates but from 1875.

Quoting H. P. Blavatsky:

I must tell you that during the last quarter of every hundred years an attempt is made by those "Masters," of whom I have spoken, to help on the spiritual progress of Humanity in a marked and definite way. Towards the close of each century you will invariably find that an outpouring or upheaval of spirituality — or call it mysticism if you prefer — has taken place. Some one or more persons have appeared in the world as their agents, and a greater or less amount of occult knowledge and teaching has been given out. If you care to do so, you can trace these movements back, century by century, as far as our detailed historical records extend. — *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 306.

Some indication of these different aspects of the Theosophical Movement in each century has already been given in Chapter 3. One interesting chapter in mystical history began in the Egyptian city of Alexandria in the third century with Ammonius Saccas and the Neoplatonists. It was then that the word *theosophy* was first applied to the teachings of the secret doctrine or wisdom-religion. H. P. Blavatsky calls Ammonius Saccas "a saintly adept." He seems to have been the first of the public agents of the mahatmas to what we know as Western civilization. (See the opening chapters of *The Key to Theosophy* for an interesting account of this era and its great theosophists.)

We must remember that in every ancient civilizations the work of the great teachers of the Brotherhood of Compassion was well understood, for all of them had their Mystery schools, and the teachers connected with these had been initiates of the Brotherhood and taught its age-old system of ethics and spiritual science. Unfortunately, in the early years of our Christian Era the Mystery schools in Greece, which had been the chief source of all spiritual light in the antique world around the Mediterranean, had been gradually deteriorating. Their teachers had lapsed from their high calling, becoming faithless to the teachings and were no longer true initiates of the secret doctrine. Among them spiritual self-discipline and selfless devotion to truth and impersonal love had been replaced by love of power and privilege. He who would know the doctrine must first live the life, a fundamental principle of occultism. The influence of these Schools was therefore waning, and a little later in the sixth century AD the last of them was closed in Athens, at the request of its own teachers, by the Emperor Justinian.

After the termination of the Mystery schools the Theosophical Movement was obliged, because of the prevailing religious bigotry of the times, to follow more or less concealed channels, becoming almost completely hidden. From the sixth century to the nineteenth, there was a period of thirteen hundred years during which only a few teachers and some secret societies, such as the true Rosicrucian Order, could be used by the Lodge of mahatmas as their agents to keep the doctrines alive in the Western world. The last of these agents we know of were Count Saint-Germain and the celebrated Cagliostro near the close of the eighteenth century. The latter, who was called by H. P. Blavatsky the "last of the Rosicrucians," made an attempt to found a Mystery school through his work with occult Masonry, but was more or less defeated by the bigotry of his day.

We come now to the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York City in 1875. Ostensibly it was started by H. P. Blavatsky herself, assisted by a group of students whom she drew around her, including Henry Steel Olcott and William Q. Judge. But she has often told us how she was sent to New York by her

teachers a little in advance of the opening years of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. She was told by them to start an organization through which could be restated in a form suited to the type of intelligence and to the needs of our modern world the ancient truths of the wisdom-religion. The mahatmas themselves say:

One or two of us [the Brotherhood or Lodge of mahatmas] hoped that the world had so far advanced intellectually, if not intuitionally, that the Occult doctrine might gain an intellectual acceptance, and the impulse given for a new cycle of occult research. . . . We sent her [H. P. Blavatsky] to America . . . and the trial began. — The Mahatma M. in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 263

H. P. Blavatsky tells us:

Orders received from India direct to establish a philosophico-religious Society and choose a name for it — also to choose Olcott. July 1875. — From one of her Scrapbooks, Blavatsky's *Collected Writings*, 1:

"From India direct" meant in her case but one thing — from the mahatmas.

The evidence showing their work in connection with the founding and progress of the young Theosophical Society can be read in their own letters as published in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*. Here the student can find a complete and detailed picture, and also, scattered among these records of their activities are found hints on other lines of work — what we may call their more esoteric lines of spiritual activity behind the scenes of human affairs.

As time went on and H. P. Blavatsky established in 1888-9 with the active help of W. Q. Judge her Esoteric Section, the first step was taken towards the revival of the Mystery schools. As exoteric theosophy for the public brought back to humanity the long forgotten wisdom-religion of the ages, so the renewal of the ancient Mystery schools restored the ethical-scientific study of occultism, and established that study as a living force in the modern world. The old sacred relationship of spiritual teacher and his disciples pledged to live and work for the spiritual welfare of humanity became once more a vital factor in mankind's spiritual education.

Evidence that the mahatmas were behind H. P. Blavatsky's work in establishing the Esoteric Section can be found in abundance in H. P. Blavatsky's *Collected Writings*. A brief, comprehensive and interesting account of the history of the modern Theosophical Movement where the above mentioned facts are more fully described can be found also in Charles J. Ryan's *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement*.

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## Chapter 5: Chelas and the Chela Life

Enough has already been said about the mahatmas and their disciples to give some idea of what chelaship means. The Sanskrit word *chela* is used because it has a more specific significance than the words "pupil" or "disciple" as understood today. To be a chela implies a peculiar degree of loyalty to one's chosen teacher and to the principles underlying his teachings. It also, and more particularly, implies a realization of the sacredness of the bond between the chela and his spiritual teacher, or to use again the Eastern word, his *guru*. We might helpfully quote a few passages in this connection:

*To the earnest Disciple his Teacher takes the place of Father and Mother, for, whereas they gave him his body and his faculties, its life and casual form, the Teacher shows him how to develop the inner faculties for the acquisition of the Eternal Wisdom. — From the Book of Discipline in the Schools of 'Dzyan'*

Now this relation is an extremely sacred one, because . . . the Teacher, the Guru, the Master . . . acts as the midwife, bringing to birth, helping to bring into the active life of the disciple, the hid part of the disciple, the soul of the man. — G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, pp. 527-8

Even a teacher of ordinary subjects has a responsibility to his pupils in his influence upon their developments and ideals, while the pupils have an obligation of gratitude to one who has been an inspiration and perhaps opened to him doors of vision and resolve. But how much deeper is this bond of responsibility and gratitude between pupil and spiritual teacher — one who can show us how to solve all our apparently unsolvable problems and how to recreate ourselves and our lives. Yet such a spiritual relationship goes deeper even than this, since an occult teacher is one who can open for us the inner realms of being. It is not so-called religious instruction that he gives, though ethics and morals are the foundation of all genuine spiritual teaching. He does what religion as we moderns know it can never do. He not only gives knowledge but actually quickens the human soul, much as the flame of mind was quickened in the early races of mankind by the manasaputras or Promethean light-bringers. In a sense, a real spiritual teacher literally raises his chela from the dead, for unless we are born again we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. And as Jesus said, the Kingdom of Heaven is within us.

There are two broad divisions in chelaship. There are, first, lay or probationary chelas. Second, those chelas who through long self-discipline, perhaps in many former incarnations as well as in this one, have proved themselves worthy. They are then accepted by the mahatmas themselves for intensive occult training. Lay chelas, or probationers, train themselves. They are given the fundamental doctrines of the wisdom-religion, particularly those that explain the scientific basis of ethics. The degree of earnestness and devotion with which they study and apply these teachings constitutes the first test on the chela path. To the extent that the student sincerely applies himself to determined self-training and self-discipline in the practice of ethics and brotherhood will the period be longer or shorter which leads to his being accepted by the mahatmas as a chela pledged irrevocably to the service of humanity. Every sincere and devoted student is in this sense a probationary chela. He may not be conscious of it, but his real progress in impersonal devotion to family and friends, to his fellows, and to work for humanity will be registered karmically. As this good karma accumulates, the chela will be led ever nearer to the presence of the mahatmas.

There is an ancient saying that discipline precedes the Mysteries, and when we consider the real nature and objects of a Mystery school we understand why this must be so. The teachings in a Mystery school comprise a knowledge of the actual and tremendously powerful laws upon which the universe and life are built. To be able to smash the atom and release titanic forces, with all the dangers which attend such power, gives a faint idea of the potencies and possibilities for either good or evil which a knowledge of occult nature bestows. So, necessarily, moral and spiritual discipline of a most serious kind must precede the student's admission into

this sacred arcana. Besides, unlike what is popularly known as science, the occult teachings are not experimental. They never veer and change from guess to guess, and from theory to theory.

Why is this? From whence do the Mystery schools derive their certain knowledge about these hidden things? The following passage answers:

Great intellects, titanic spiritual Seers, have sent their consciousness behind the veils of the outward seeming deep into the womb of invisible Nature and have brought back what they have seen, and have formulated their knowledge into a grand system of thought. This system of thought we today call Theosophy. It is the Mother of all the great religions and great philosophies of the past time, and will be so of those of the future; for this reason: that every one of these other great systems of thought has been founded upon the teaching of some great spiritual Seer and Sage. — G. de Purucker, *The Masters and the Path of Occultism*, p. 19

What are some of these deeper teachings revealed to chelas in the Mystery Schools? For a detailed description the student is recommended to read *The Esoteric Tradition* by G. de Purucker. But a brief outline of a few of them may here be given. They are taught among other things the real origin of their spiritual nature, their spiritual heredity, so to speak. They learn how and why they are actually children of the cosmic gods. The door to the inner worlds of being is opened for them and they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the circulations of the cosmos and the journeys of the spiritual monad along those cosmic highways into the "vast and inner and invisible Worlds and Spheres," to quote from the above mentioned book. Two further paragraphs are quoted here:

One of the main objectives of such training is the stimulation of the moral sense to become so strong in the life of the disciple that the voice of conscience becomes the instant and relatively unerring monitor indicating which path at any moment the disciple should follow. Coincident with this is the training of the intellect to become keen, instant in action and, under the guidance of the moral sense, virtually unerring in judgment. — p. 570, 3rd & rev. ed.

The whole attempt of inner training is to attain self-identification in progressive and ever-enlarging stages with the great spiritual powers on which the universe itself is constructed and with which it is molded. — pp. 569-70, 3rd & rev. ed.

This expression about the "spiritual powers" refers to the cosmic and solar gods from which our immortal self is radiated or, more correctly, emanated. Chela training under a mahatma opens to the chela the path to self-conscious union with his spiritual parent, his own inner god. And when the pledged chela has been well prepared by his guru or spiritual teacher and is ready for the supreme trial he then embarks upon the sacred and wonderful adventure of initiation.

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## Chapter 6: Initiation — The Goal of Evolution

There is a road, steep and thorny, and beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the heart of the Universe. I can tell you how to find Those who will show you the secret gateway that leads inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onward, there is reward past all telling: the power to bless and serve humanity. For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come. — Editorial in *Lucifer*, vol. 9

The purpose of all initiatory ceremonies — . . . the aim of all initiatory teachings of the ancient Mystery-Schools was . . . the evocation of the higher self, of this inner being; and it is possible to do it. A strong and indomitable will is the first requisite. Purity of life is the second, mental purity above everything else. And absolute loyalty and devotion to the teachings of the Esoteric Wisdom and to the Teacher, is the third. — G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, p. 361

Perhaps the greatest boon that theosophy bestows is the conviction that at last we actually know where we are going. Unlike the unhappy, drifting, bewildered mass of human beings, the earnest and sincere student of occultism has a definite objective. No matter how far in the future it may be, the student knows that sometime, as surely as the sun rises every day, the privilege of trying for initiation into the mysteries of occult nature will come, promising the radiant moment of reunion with the higher self. Never again will there be really uncertainty, laziness, or morally incompetence. There is something absorbingly interesting and worthwhile to work for, and the opportunity to press joyfully onward, serving with those noble helpers who are in advance of the human race, towards that spiritual perfection which shall enable the striver to draw the whole of humanity itself a fraction farther onward along our difficult evolutionary way. The sun, moving ever forward through its steadfast orbit draws all its planets year by year into new spaces of the universe. So do we, steadfastly following the path of occult progress, draw forward all those who are united to us in the bonds of spiritual brotherhood. Every human problem and every human sorrow will be just that much clearer and lighter because the chela as an individual has been able to make the goal.

Furthermore, in following the path of initiation the chela, either lay or accepted, is embarking upon a splendid adventure. Life for the average person is so dull. There is hardly one man or woman in a million who is not more or less a slave to some crippling limitation of environment. Aldous Huxley says somewhere that modern man is everywhere intensely bored with life. And does it not seem logical to conclude that the prevalence of crime amongst the young is largely due to these crippling environments which offer no scope for individual initiative, and which surround the effervescing energies of the young with little but the intensely commonplace?

Now, in exchange for this drabness, what does initiation offer us? To reiterate the words of a teacher, it shows us how to invoke the peace and power and guidance of the higher self. It changes us "into becoming the bird of eternity." In other words, it sets us free. It opens the doors out of the cage of our personality. It shows us how then to spread our spiritual wings which now lie so feeble and closely folded from disuse — and, escaping from our physical and psychological limitations, to fare forth upon the highways of the cosmos.

To the highest initiates there are no closed doors in the universe. The inner worlds, with all their strange and fresh and wondrous realms, lie open before them. For their training has developed in them that piercing spiritual vision to which G. de Purucker so often refers. Theirs are the strong faculties and the mighty spiritual pinions that can carry them to the very innermost portals of the spiritual sun.

A further passage may show in slightly more detail what initiation implies. The writer begins by describing



the greatest event in the history of our globe — the awakening in man of self-conscious humanhood:

This our "awakening" was called by H. P. Blavatsky, the *incarnation of the Manasaputras*, or the Sons of Mind, or Light. Had that incarnation not taken place, we indeed should have continued our evolution by merely "natural" causes, but it would have been slow almost beyond comprehension, almost interminable; but that act of self-sacrifice, through their immense pity, their immense love, though, indeed, acting under Karmic impulse, awakened the divine fire in our own selves, gave us light and comprehension and understanding; so from that time we ourselves became the "Sons of the Gods"; the faculty of self-consciousness in us was awakened, our eyes were opened, responsibility became ours; and our feet were then set definitely upon the path . . . leading inwards back to our spiritual home.

. . . initiation is in fact a quickening process, but it is also something else; it is a copy, an endeavor to copy, what was done by the incarnation of those Lords of Understanding, Sons of Light. It is an attempt to stimulate, to awaken into activity, the inner spiritual Self, to enliven us more quickly, to enable us to see and understand, saving those who successfully pass through the tests aeons and aeons of suffering and strife, and, noblest of all, enabling those whose minds have become enlightened, themselves to do the same for their brothers who are less progressed than they. — G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, pp. 258-9

Moreover, in following the path of initiation under a spiritual teacher who is part of the Brotherhood of Compassion, we knit ourselves into the Great White Lodge and its work. To the extent that we then become chelas in spirit and try sincerely to live the chela-life, we become a vital part of that Brotherhood. We have ceased to be wanderers. We have found our true place in the universal plan. We learn who we are, where we came from, whither we are bound and, the best and quickest way to get there. Suffering no longer daunts us, for it becomes a gateway to freedom.

Even beyond all this, however, is the immediate power initiation will give aspirants to help and bless others. Not only will their mere presence spread protection and balm and inspiration, they will eventually become a part of the living Guardian Wall which surrounds humanity. The significance of this statement will be clear from the following:

These sages are sometimes called the Guardian Wall, for they form in fact a living, spiritual and intellectual wall of protection around mankind, guarding men against whatever evils men themselves are unable, because of ignorance, to ward off or to neutralize. Yet such guarding is always in strict accordance with the dominant karma of humanity, against which, even the great sages can no more work than against any one of the other laws of nature. They are in utter fidelity the servants of the universal mother in her spiritual, causative functions. They help men, they inspire and protect whenever they can, and in such fashion as their profound knowledge of the karmic chain of cause and effect in which humanity is entangled permits them to do. Thus it is that they serve the humanity over which they stand as elder brothers and guides. — G. de Purucker, *The Esoteric Tradition*, 3rd & rev. ed., p. 492

From the foregoing pages it will easily be seen that for the various stages of initiatory training an adept-teacher is necessary. Even students of mere physical science must have long preparation, with help and guidance from an expert, if they aim to do serious research work in a well equipped laboratory. So likewise must advanced chelas, who aspire to the difficult and perilous occult highways which lead to initiation, have the guidance and help of a spiritual expert or adept to watch over and direct their progress. They must of course do the work themselves. A child must learn to walk, and talk, and use its own faculties no matter how much help it may have. Chelas must themselves develop the higher spiritual and the lower psychic clairvoyance and the other inner senses and powers which enable them to adventure and learn in these new fields of life. But in order that they may not go astray and that their efforts may be of the highest efficiency, they will naturally need the suggestions and guidance of a Master of Life.

All this may seem very remote to those who, like you and me, regard ourselves as quite average and commonplace men and women. Yet does not our intense determination to find the meaning of things lift us

out of the average? Most assuredly it does. There has reached the inner ear of every sincere searcher a whisper from the heart of the universe. No one who has once heard that still, small voice — "the voice of the silence" — and known the divine nostalgia which it inspires in the soul, will ever again be content with the husks of material or merely intellectual satisfactions.

One of the most beautiful things about a knowledge of these truths is that they exalt the commonplace of everyday. No matter how difficult or uninspiring the daily grind may be, when one thinks and lives and feels in the atmosphere of occult truth, every form of drudgery will be suffused with the buddhic splendor. No matter how tied down or weary the body, the person will be free. The very act of doing faithfully and impersonally each small duty will itself be a first step on the pathway of initiation, for all that a student of occultism does will be self-consciously dedicated to impersonal service. In addition, we will know why we are doing it. Not having any egotistical demands as to the result, we will be able to do it a hundred percent better than formerly. Understanding reincarnation and karma; knowing that our feet are set irrevocably upon the right path; possessing in our mind and heart the esoteric keys to the sanctuary — the man or woman so humbly and faithfully working is literally a companion and co-worker with the gods.

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## Chapter 7: How Can We Reach the Mahatmas?

One of the most frequent and most natural questions of the inquirer is the one at the head of this page: "How can I meet a mahatma? How would I know one if I were to see him?" The teaching about our Elder Brothers is so consoling, and holds so much inspiration and purely novel interest for a seeker that the first impulse is to reach out like doubting Thomas and be assured by means of the senses that the mahatmas actually exist. He longs to meet them, to secure their attention and guidance. And of course it is right for anyone who has lived the life and complied with the conditions they set for their chelas, to aspire and hope for such ultimate personal relationship with them. We naturally long to find our spiritual teacher and devote our life to the service of humanity.

Yet theosophical literature will have been written in vain if students do not soon learn that they must first earn the right to come under direct personal notice. As one of the mahatmas wrote long ago, in the very beginning of the Theosophical Society, to an applicant for chelaship:

If you really want to be a *chela* i.e. to become the recipient of our mysteries, *you* have to adapt yourself to *our* ways, not we to *yours*. Until you do so, it is useless for you to expect any more than we can give under ordinary circumstances. — *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 235

It is not only a question of having the right, but of individual development. If any one of us were to pass a mahatma on the street, the chances are 1000 to 1 that we would not recognize him as such, unless he chose to reveal his presence to us. The reason for this lies in our own undeveloped spirituality. It is rare almost to the point of impossibility to find anyone in whom the inner spiritual sense necessary to detect the presence of a mahatma is yet unfolded. His mere physical appearance will not necessarily proclaim the inner self. It is the developed spiritual nature, not the body, which makes the Master of Life.

"But," you may reply, "if the mahatma is so far ahead of us, why is his body too not different from ours?" It is different, certainly. But in what way is it different? Simply in the *quality* of the atoms and molecules and cells which build it. The material of our bodies, soaked as most of them are with fatigue poisons, and often with the germs of disease, or disturbed by nervous and emotional instability, could not be used by a pure and exalted being such as a mahatma. He has long, long ago so refined and transmuted his physical atoms that his body is built only of the finest and purest materials. The essence and vibration of all his atoms and molecules are of an inconceivably higher order than ours. He could no more live and breathe in such a body as ours than a bird could live under water, or a butterfly exist in its discarded chrysalis. This very unlikeness in essence and vibration would make it extremely unlikely that we could sense his physical presence. The same thing is true of his psychological apparatus — his mind and human feelings. They are all entirely different from ours, and that difference is as invisible to our mental apprehension as the ultraviolet ray is to our eyesight. Of course the higher we go in thinking of his constitution, the more remote the possibility that there could be any casual rapport between an ordinary person and a mahatma.

Just here we may answer the third question asked in Chapter 1: Where do the mahatmas live? The inner and highest Lodge of the mahatmas is situated in regions untrodden by the mass of mankind. Here they may live in an atmosphere, physical and spiritual, that makes their work possible. Moreover, here they can be uninterrupted. Even casual thought will show that if they lived where they could be easily reached, their work would suffer, as much from friends as enemies. Even physical science has had its enemies. Think what a long struggle science has had through three hundred years to earn its freedom for untrammelled investigation and research. This will easily suggest why the mahatmas find it expedient to isolate themselves. They are powerful enough to neutralize attacks of bigotry, curiosity, and all other kinds of investigation, opposition, and interruption, but they are too wise to waste their energies in this way. Why expend energy to protect their work against the hordes of human passion when by just withdrawing to the solitudes they can live and work at their easiest and best? This is another reason why it is almost impossible for an ordinary, spiritually

undeveloped man or woman to meet a mahatma.

These facts have their parallel within the world at large. High executives of great commercial enterprises are protected against intrusion. It is almost impossible for anyone but the important and favored few to work through the cordon of office employees, secretaries, and contact men who surround and cut off an industrial executive from the public. The same is true of all important and highly placed people. They have such responsibilities and important work to do under so much intensity and strain that they have to be protected against useless and wasteful contacts. So we see that the mahatmas are not so different in their need for quiet and seclusion in their spiritual retreats. However, with them there is the all-important difference that they are always in inner and sympathetic and ministering touch with humanity and its problems.

Messengers of the Lodge are necessarily more like ourselves, at least in their physical bodies, so that if we will, we can recognize the agents of the Lodge by our own intuitive vision. Yet — how many can do even this much? If one cannot discover behind the personality of a man or woman the presence of a real spiritual teacher, how then recognize a Master and teacher-adept?

Happily, the Masters can see us, for they have developed spiritual and psychic clairvoyance which enables them to look over the whole world. Every act on our part of genuine self-mastery and unselfish devotion to the interests of another brings us nearer to their recognition and help.

This, then, is the first step in reaching the mahatmas: so to live that the inner light kindled in our hearts and minds will bring us to their attention. We may be sure that they are looking eagerly for disciples. If humanity is to be saved from the lower forces of its own nature, then this Brotherhood of Compassion must gradually spread its wings to take in as many of the human race as can make the grade in this great period of evolution, called a manvantara. The Theosophical Society was founded for that purpose, as a nucleus of universal brotherhood. Its aim was not only to establish a knowledge of our spiritual brotherhood as a fact in nature, but a training school in the *practice* of universal brotherhood. We must not only know that brotherhood is a fact, we must prove that fact by living it. We each should set an example to the world so that all will recognize that brotherhood is not only abstractly true, but possible to live.

One sure way of more closely approaching the mahatmas is to lend our help in the work of demonstrating and establishing universal brotherhood. As they said:

The *Chiefs* want a "Brotherhood of Humanity," a real Universal Fraternity started; an institution which would make itself known throughout the world and arrest the attention of the highest minds.  
— *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 24

And again:

the chief object of the T. S. is not so much to gratify individual aspirations as to serve our fellow men. — *Ibid* p. 7-8

The Brotherhood of Compassion is not a mere association of congenially thinking people, like a club, or a church, or a political or social fraternity. One does not become a member of that Brotherhood by signing a printed form or receiving a diploma. To become incorporated in this Brotherhood means that one must to some extent change one's nature into the same kind of psychological and spiritual *stuff*, so to speak. Only this can so change individuals that they become actual living cells in the tissue of this Brotherhood. It can almost be called a matter of alchemical or spiritual chemistry. You cannot combine into one substance two chemical elements which have no real vibrational affinity. You may bring them together under all sorts of conditions, but you cannot fool nature. Utterly disparate elements will not combine under any conditions. And a person's mind and soul must be in harmony to some extent with the nature of the Brotherhood of Compassion before being absorbed into its inner body.

Nearly every searcher has already something of this spiritual affinity with the mahatmas. Whoever goes on as a constantly more impersonal and selflessly devoted worker will find the very atoms of his mind and body altering, and this change will knit him still further into its living organism. Our personality no longer will float like a helpless insect caught in the web of individual and world karma. We gradually disentangles

ourselves from that web by knitting ever more closely our personality with its immortal higher self. And then as we change, we become like a strand of light, an indestructible ray woven into that refulgent tissue of spiritual light which surrounds, permeates, and supports with its love and succor the toiling world of mankind, for that tissue of golden light is the Brotherhood of Compassion.

There is yet one point more that may prove of real interest. The mahatmas have not always needed to live in strict seclusion, nor will they need to do so in the future. There have been epochs in the cyclic rise and fall of evolution when the level of spirituality of the human race was high. At such times the great teachers can mingle with a certain amount of freedom in the outer world. There have also been times of crisis or spiritual emergency when they have felt compelled to appear in person to give counsel or aid, yet such rare appearances have generally been incognito, so to say. There are many fascinating historical legends that have grown up around these appearances. W. Q. Judge, on page 31 of *Echoes from the Orient*, reports one such incident said to have happened to Napoleon before personal ambition led to failure, and there are many other such instances scattered through the pages of history. We understand that if enough people are faithful to the work of true self-dedication and self-mastery, the time may not be too far distant before the mahatmas will find conditions in the world favorable to their occasional reappearance among us.

As a final keynote to this subject of mahatmas and chelas, we may quote the following from the mahatma Morya on page 252 of *The Mahatma Letters*:

How many times had we to repeat, that he who joins the Society with the sole object of coming in contact with us and if not of acquiring at least of assuring himself of the reality of such powers and of our objective existence — was pursuing a mirage? I say again then. It is he alone who has the love of humanity at heart, who is capable of grasping thoroughly the idea of a regenerating practical Brotherhood who is entitled to the possession of our secrets. He alone, such a man — will never misuse his powers, as there will be no fear that he will turn them to selfish ends. A man who places not the good of mankind above his own good is not worthy of becoming our *chela* — he is not worthy of becoming higher in knowledge than his neighbour.

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